

Behind the scenes: the N.H.L.'s statistical wizard and, on page 50, the league's security department...



News Release

from **RON ANDREWS**
Director of Information and Statistician

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Release Number

For Immediate Release

WALTON SCORES 1 GOAL EVERY 3 SHOTS

MONTREAL--Vancouver Canuck center accuracy during the first half of the season. His mark of 31.6 per cent years the NHL has compiled such a Walton scored 18 goals on 5

of the season, which means he's The previous high for a player in an entire season, was 26. in 1972-73 when he had 18

Even with his record Deblois of New York Rangers per cent; and center Giguere

Among players with more. Never before percentage of 20.0

Following is first half of the

PLAYER

Mike Walton
Lucien DeBlois



STATISTICS

from Ron Andrews, Director of Information and Statistician
Mike Griffin, Assistant Director of Information

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CONFERENCE CHAMPIONSHIP AND TWO PLAYOFF SPOTS UNDECIDED.

MONTREAL--With one week remaining in the National Hockey League's 1977-78 regular-season schedule, there are still positions to be decided with the most important being the winner of the Clarence Campbell Conference Championship, awarded to the team from either the Clarence Campbell or Patrick Division with the most points at the end of the season.

While Montreal Canadiens have clinched the Prince of Wales Championship, New York Islanders and Philadelphia are vying for both the Patrick Division and Campbell Conference titles. Islanders hold a five-point lead although Flyers have played one game fewer. The winner will receive award money totaling \$5,000 per man as each title is worth \$2,500 per player.

In the race for the final wild-card playoff spot, New York Rangers need either one point in its final four games or Pittsburgh not win its remaining four games. If the teams finish with the same number of points, Rangers would advance by virtue of having more wins. New York has 29 wins and 71 points while Pittsburgh has 23 wins and 64 points.

Colorado and Vancouver are battling for the other playoff spot with Colorado leading by two points while both clubs have three games remaining. If both finished with the same number of points, the tie would be first broken by the team with most wins, followed by fewest losses. Vancouver presently has 19 wins to Colorado's 18, but Vancouver has 42 losses compared to 39 for Colorado.

Individually, Islanders' Mike Bossy became the first rookie and second youngest player in NHL history to record 50 goals when he scored two power-play goals in Islanders' 3-2 win against Washington, Saturday. Montreal's Pierre Larouche scored 53 goals during the 1975-76 season while with Pittsburgh, recording his 50th five months after his 20th birthday. Bossy celebrated his 21st birthday, Jan. 22. Bossy's two power-play goals also gave him 24 for the season a figure that only one other NHL player has ever reached. Rangers' Phil Esposito scored a record 28 power-play goals while with Boston during the 1971-72 season and had other seasons of 27 and 25.

Montreal's Guy Lafleur appears to be headed for his scoring title with 129 points and a 10-point lead. Lafleur would join Gordie Howe, who won the title in 1955, and Esposito, with four players to win more

He Works Magic with Numbers

by David Dunbar

"I have often admired the mystical way of Pythagoras, and the secret magic of numbers."

Sir Thomas Browne

HOCKEY'S MOST SCIENTIFIC and comprehensive expert had a brief and singularly inaccurate career. He was a \$500,000 computer named Foster. Before the 1970-71 season, three Toronto programmers fed him a feast of facts on every active N.H.L. player, plus results of the previous season. After much thoughtful

whirring, clicking and computing, Foster regurgitated the name of the 1970-71 Stanley Cup winner: the Boston Bruins.

He was wrong. Neither man nor machine could have predicted that Boston's league-leading scorers—Phil Esposito, Bobby Orr, John Bucyk and Ken Hodge—would be thwarted in the playoffs by the Montreal Canadiens' rookie goalie Ken Dryden. The Canadiens upset Boston in seven games, then downed Minnesota in the semifinals and Chicago in the final.

The computer's goof didn't surprise N.H.L. statistician Ron Andrews, who provided Foster's numerical diet. (Andrews had analyzed his information and chosen the Canadiens to win the cup in 1970-71.) "You can't play hockey with statistics," he says. "Football and baseball are guided by the law of averages. Hockey coaches can devise statistically based systems, but if an opponent poke-checks the puck, the whole plan goes awry."

Andrews' opinion about football's predictability is confirmed each year

Collecting facts since he was a child, Ron Andrews—"a great pack rat"—is the N.H.L.'s resident statistician.

by Los Angeles computer statistician Bud Goode and his Univac 1106. In 1972 he accurately predicted that the Miami Dolphins would post a 17-0 record and win the Super Bowl. Last year he made the unlikely—but correct—forecast that the Denver Broncos would go to the Super Bowl only to lose to the Dallas Cowboys (he has Dallas winning this year, too).

Such computer gimmickry in hockey is useful only to arouse fan interest. "About 75 percent of my statistics are for publicity only," says Andrews. "They keep the old arguments going: Was Morenz better than Richard? Is Orr the greatest ever? People are *nuts* about statistics; they *demand* them."

Part of this passion is due to the N.H.L.'s expansion in the United States. "American fans are more aware of stats because of baseball. We don't get many questions from Canadians. One I get all the time, though, is how many goals has a right defenseman scored as opposed to the left defenseman. I don't know, and I couldn't care less."

Players share the fans fixation. "They're *obsessed* with stats," says Andrews. "I've had calls at 3 A.M. from players bitching about an assist they thought they should have been credited."

Their concern is understandable.

Bonuses are often based on statistics, and those telling numbers often cost players their jobs. "Coaches judge a player by performance," he says, "but they use statistics to confirm their opinions."

Fortunately, coaches discriminate when using Andrews' material. For example, Larry Robinson, Montreal's all-star defenseman, had a negative 3.1 plus-minus figure in 1977-78. This means that Robinson was on the ice for 3.1 percent more goals scored *against* Montreal than by them. Yet Robinson's apparently leaky play is due to a high-powered Montreal offense, which pumps in goals when Robinson is off the ice, thus lowering his plus-minus figure.

Andrews invented this category. "I created a monster," says the statistician, who acts (and looks) more like actor Jack Klugman than Dr. Frankenstein. "Obviously, players on top teams had better ratings than those on poor clubs. I've seen players leave the ice when they thought a goal would be scored against their team. Now the plus-minus is based on a player's production relative to his team."

Five officials ("conscientious observers, not fans") in each N.H.L. city assist Andrews in compiling these incriminating figures. A scorer records goals and assists. A game timekeeper

runs the clock, a penalty timekeeper notes infractions, and two statisticians record shots on net and who is on the ice for each goal. After the game the information is sent to Andrews, then fed into a computer programmed for two defensive categories (goals-against average for goalies and plus-minus figures for others) and about 25 offensive categories, including such assessments as "proximate goals"—tallies that reduce a team's deficit from two goals to one. Andrews translates this numerical hodgepodge into a weekly summary which is mailed to more than 2,000 media people.

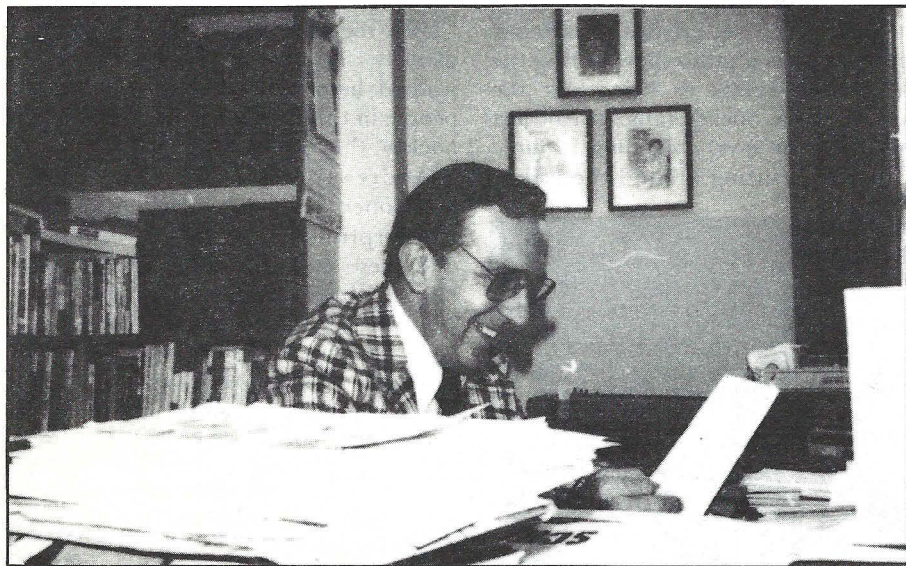
Despite his willingness to record obscure accomplishments, Andrews admits that some of his work is gratuitous. "There are too many statistics," he says. "We don't keep some figures we should. During the 1972 Canada-Russia series, I recorded *where* shots were taken. It's more meaningful than shots on goal—a useless statistic—because it indicates how dangerous a shot was."

Another telling figure kept by some teams, but not by Andrews, is hits or body checks. "Just like a tackle in football," he says, explaining a category especially favored by the belligerent Toronto Maple Leafs, "they note how many times players knock opponents off the puck."

Andrews knows more about the "how manys, whens and whats" than any other man in hockey. His command of such information has earned him such nicknames as Mr. Numbers, the Human Computer, and the Bureau of Information. "He's better than the *Guinness Book of World Records*," claims former N.H.L. president Clarence Campbell. "He has it all on the tip of his tongue." Andrews disdains such hyperbole. "I'm not an expert. I don't have a photographic memory; I know my sources."

For trivia buffs and grateful hockey writers, Ron Andrews has been *the* source for more than 25 years. Hospitalized for two years as a child with polio, Andrews amused himself by organizing newspaper hockey summaries into elaborate categories. "I didn't see a hockey game until I was 10."

His disability later kept him off the



Often swamped by information, Ron Andrews—whose nicknames range from Mr. Numbers to the Human Computer—is "better than the 'Guinness Book of World Records'" according to former N.H.L. president Clarence Campbell.

ice but not away from hockey (today only his right leg below the knee is affected). "In high school English classes, the other kids read great literature," he says. "I worked on statistics."

His writing didn't suffer. In 1954, he began covering the hometown Maple Leafs for Canadian Press, a national news agency. Andrews bolstered his copy with facts and figures from his bulging files. So did other scribes. "They started asking to see my files for statistics to help them with their stories," he says.

In 1963, Andrews became the N.H.L.'s publicity director and statistician and moved to league headquarters in Montreal's mausoleumlike Sun Life Building. He dusted off 40 years of game reports, and spent three years compiling figures into categories. "I was astounded to learn so few statistics had been kept," says Andrews. "Until 1943-44 there was not even a record of games played by a player. It was only goals, points and penalty minutes."

Andrews' interpretation of previously meaningless information revived flagging reputations and created new ones. The old hockey guide noted that Babe Dye scored 202 career goals. Hardly an astounding total for the Toronto forward, who once was offered a \$25,000 bonus to sign with Connie Mack's Philadelphia baseball team. Andrews dug deeper and discovered that Dye accomplished the feat in only 253 games, making him the second most productive N.H.L. scorer (.738 average) after Cy Denneny of the Ottawa Senators and the Boston Bruins.

Andrews' pride and joy is the annual *National Hockey League Guide*, a meaty reference work containing everything from schedules to a trivia quiz. During Andrews' tenure, the

Did you know . . .

- that there are 17 retired N.H.L. jersey numbers?
- that the term "hat trick" actually originated in the sport of cricket in 1882?
- that Rogie Vachon went 164 minutes 11 seconds without yielding a goal—an N.H.L. record?
- that former Montreal goalie Bill Durnan has won more Vezina Trophies (six) than any other goalie?
- that of 13 players with at least 400 regular-season goals, three have never been named to the First All-Star Team (Yvan Cournoyer, Alex Delvecchio and Jean Ratelle)?
- that Bill Mosienko scored three goals in 21 seconds—an N.H.L. record?
- that the average N.H.L. player is five-foot-11¾, weighs 187.7 pounds and is 26.3 years old?
- that N.H.L. players are nicked for an estimated total of 4,200 stitches each season?
- that the N.H.L. goes through some 14,000 pucks each season?
- that eight N.H.L. clubs have red in their uniforms?
- that the N.H.L.'s first tie game occurred on February 11, 1922 when the Toronto St. Pats tied the Ottawa Senators 4-4 after 20 minutes of overtime?

guide has gone from a slim volume to the current mammoth 742-page tome.

He has a simple explanation for such accomplishments: "Organization." He pauses to look at his desk, littered with unfiled information from the previous season, along with material on the 1978-79 campaign. "Make that organized chaos. I'm a great pack rat. I don't throw things away. My office is a mess, but I know where everything is. If a writer or broadcaster has a question, I have the answer in 10 seconds while I'm chatting with him."

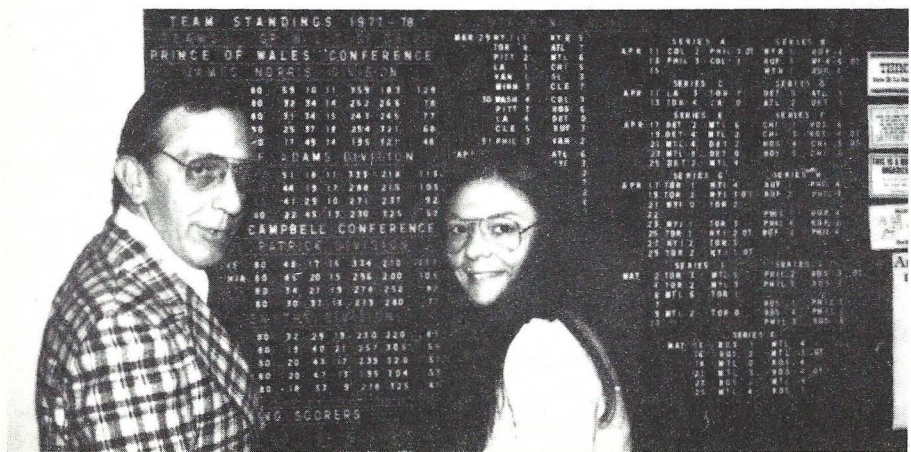
Such expertise creates problems. Andrews hosts a radio show during the season that seems to bring out the worst in some hockey fans. "I can just see them," he says, chuckling. "Three or four guys sitting around the office.

'Hey, Andrews is on the air tonight. Let's stump him.' They thumb through the guide book, then phone in with some ridiculous question such as: How many goals have been scored from the left side of the ice as opposed to the right? My answer is always: 'I don't know.' They're deflated; they want an incorrect guess so they can nail me. They've done all that work for nothing. Serves them bloody well right."

Andrews really gets annoyed at those who try to impress him with their intimate knowledge of the game. "They mention some obscure fact—usually incorrect—which they've studied before meeting me. A lot of people in this business think they know hockey; they don't."

Andrews relaxes from such questioners with his favorite pastime. Not surprisingly, he collects records—only these are vinyl, not statistical. His music library contains more than 1,800 LPs, 1,000 45s and 200 tapes. He records his own cassette anthologies ("Ron Andrews' All-time Favorites by Percy Faith" for instance).

Unfortunately, he must enjoy his hobby behind closed study doors or in his car while commuting between his downtown office and suburban home. "Not only does my wife, Marlo, hate hockey," says Andrews ruefully, "she doesn't like music either."



Andrews (with assistant Gail Pagé): hockey's master of facts and figures.